

Bracknell Forest Council

# Corporate Peer Challenge Position Statement

October 2021

Bracknell Forest Overview

Local Priorities and Outcomes

Governance and Culture

Organisational and Place Leadership

Financial Planning and Management

Capacity for Improvement

Future Challenges and Priorities

# Foreword

“ I am pleased to write the foreword of this self-assessment document. I believe it captures many of the things we have achieved in Bracknell Forest in recent years. Perhaps more importantly, it also highlights our overall approach to challenges which has allowed us to consistently deliver.

There are many successes I could point to since our last Peer Review. The ongoing regeneration of Bracknell town centre – which simply would not have happened without the council – is perhaps the most obvious example of our driving commitment to and ambition for the borough. But such an obvious success has not been realised at the expense of other services, as they remain strong across the whole spectrum of our activity. External validation by bodies such as Ofsted, the CQC and even the ICO are important benchmarks, but in Bracknell Forest we, and I as Leader, never lose sight of the importance of maintaining the quality of all of our services day after day.

councils, shown great resilience and creativity in meeting the ongoing challenge of COVID-19. All of these things are showcased in the self-assessment.

Like many councils, we face challenges in generating the capacity to deliver on our ambitious agenda. I am, however, proud of our achievements and recognise that none of them would have been possible without our effective and dedicated workforce. Our commitment to, and investment in our staff, also shows clearly throughout the document.

All that said, no organisation is perfect and there is always much to be learnt from the experience of others. I very much welcome the Peer Review team and look forward to the whole council engaging with them throughout the review and when we receive their report.

”



*Cllr Paul Bettison OBE, Leader of the Council*

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As a council we can never stand still. In recent months, for example, our approach to waste collection has changed as part of our commitment to reducing the impact of climate change. We have also transformed the way we operate and, like most

# Bracknell Forest overview

Bracknell Forest lies 28 miles west of London, within the Thames Valley and the county of Berkshire. This is a thriving part of the country with strong economic performance marked by the location of a number of business headquarters. This is balanced with rich local green spaces, and the nearby Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area.

The authority is a relatively small unitary with a population of around 122,000. The population is younger than the average with a median age of 38.7 years; life expectancy is higher than the average for England.

The majority of the population is white British (85%) however, there is increasing diversity. There are strong local links with the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.

The council has a history of genuine ambition for the borough, stable political and officer leadership and strong financial management. This has enabled the council to deliver its ambitious agenda including significant developments such as the regeneration of the town centre, which has completely redefined the town over the last five years.

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# Understanding our population

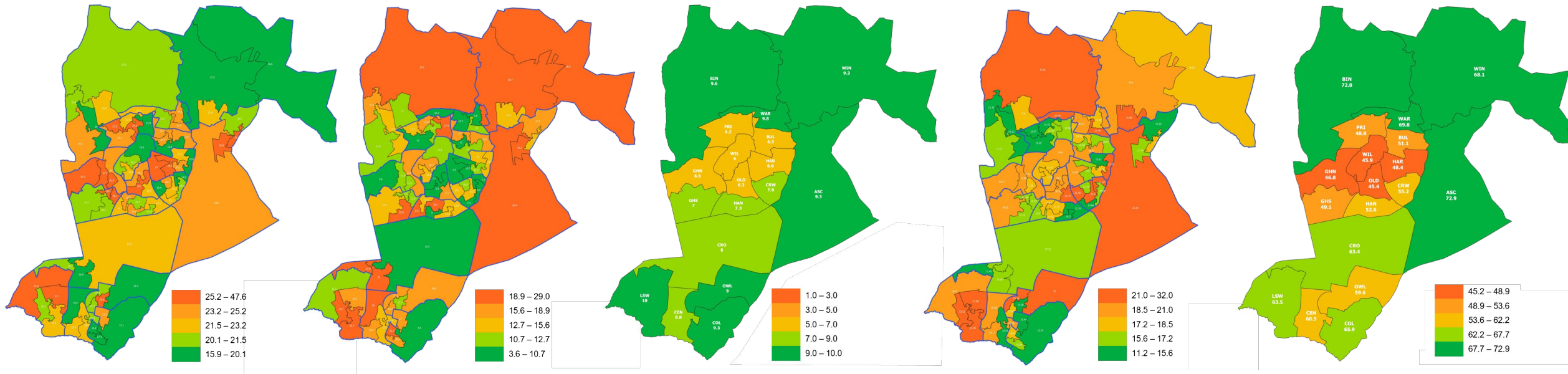
Population under 18

Population over 65

Index of Multiple Deprivation (National)

Access to Healthy Assets and Hazards

Five GCSE A\*-C rates



Bracknell Forest is one of the least deprived areas of the country (ranked 284 out of 317 local authorities in England on the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019). Crime is low in the borough and decreased by 1.8% from 2018/19 to 2019/20. Young people continue to perform in line with the national picture for academic attainment and 83% of local authority schools are rated good or outstanding.

Mapping the borough highlights where there is distinct variation across the population. For example, more older people live in the north and east of the borough. Broadly there is higher deprivation and lower attainment in Bracknell town. This information informs strategies and planning to efficiently target resources. The council has considered the context of demographics during the pandemic through reports such as the community impact assessment, this has allowed more tailored decision making and a focus of resources.

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# Population health

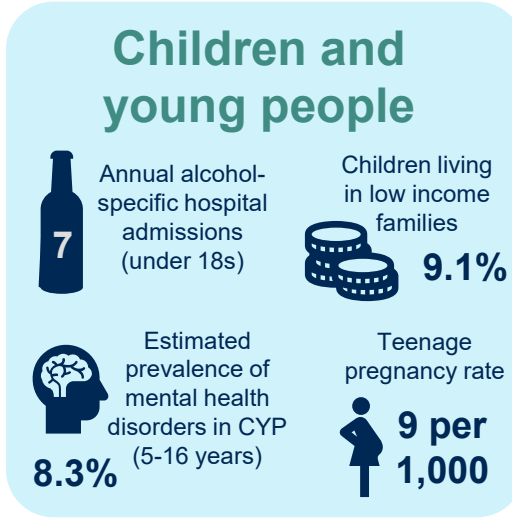
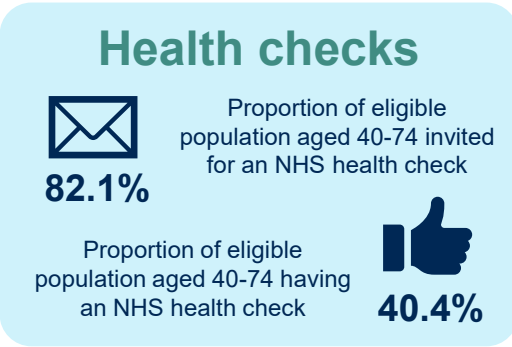
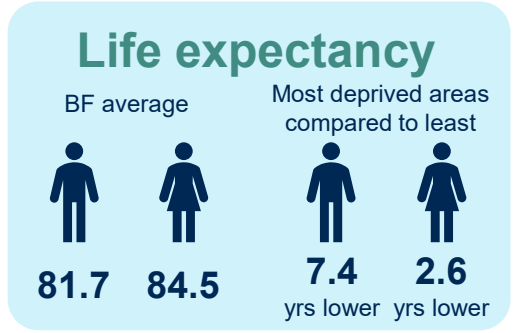
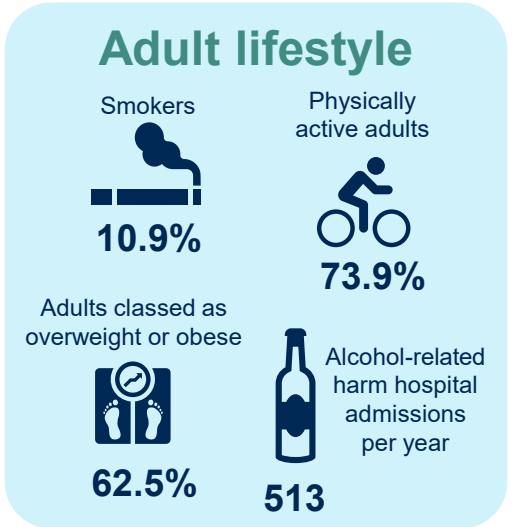
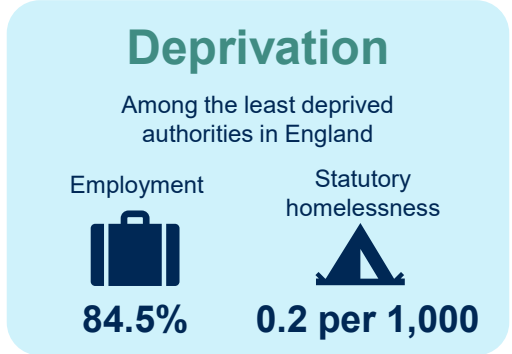
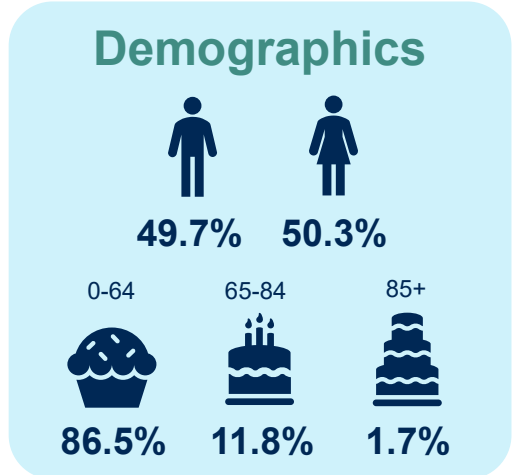
People in Bracknell Forest have a healthy life expectancy of 66.8 years for males and 67.1 years for females. This compares with 63.2 years and 63.5 years respectively nationally. At the last Census (2011) only 3.2% of residents in Bracknell Forest reported their health as poor or very poor, and 12.3% reported a long-term illness or disability that impacts on their day-to-day activities.

62.6% of adults in Bracknell Forest are reported as obese or overweight (2013-15). This compares to 64.8% for England as a whole. 24.1% of adults in Bracknell Forest report that they take part in sport and active recreation for an equivalent of 30 minutes

three times per week. 5.34% of people in Bracknell Forest have a recorded diagnosis of diabetes, which compares to a national average of 6.37%.

[LGA Health and Wellbeing Report](#)

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# Place overview



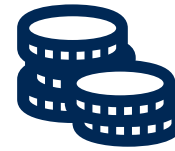
98%  
Urban  
population



14%  
Households  
with no car/van



1%  
Households  
without central  
heating



84%  
Economic  
activity rate for  
16-64



5,285  
Active  
businesses



2,725  
UC and JSA  
Claimant count  
all persons 16+



57  
Per 1,000 people  
total crimes  
reported



10  
Per 1,000 people  
Antisocial  
behaviour



51,090  
properties



1,688  
Net property  
additions



£345,000  
Median house  
price

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# Organisation overview

The council has always had an **ambitious agenda for residents and the organisation** and a strong sense of its role as the representative and custodian of place. This has materialised through Bracknell town centre's extensive redevelopment, the high quality environment and the quality and sustainability of services, many of which have been verified by external inspection and reviews. The improvements across local schools over the last decade has led to better opportunities for all children and their future skills and employability and now 82% of primary and 100% of secondary local authority schools are rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted.

Stability in political leadership and **effective management** has enabled these long term and ambitious goals to be developed and then achieved. This journey has been underpinned by the successful management of finances to create the capacity for a long term focus. These factors have led to strong prioritisation of the most important activities, with the council plan encompassing these.

These factors have continued to contribute to delivering **high quality services**. External reviews including the [Ofsted inspection \(Apr 2017\)](#), the [Joint Targeted Area Inspection \(Jan 2019\)](#) and the [children's services focused visit \(Jul 2021\)](#) have consistently reviewed Bracknell Forest Council services as effective.

Part of the journey has involved adapting to local and national challenges. We have taken specific measures to make ourselves attractive as an employer in some key staff shortage areas, such as social work and planning. As a small local authority, resilience and recruitment in specialist teams such as SEND has been tested, this is compounded by the national funding pressures in this area. Specialist skills for effective internal governance like information governance, FOIs and audits also continue to be areas of focus for the organisation's future.

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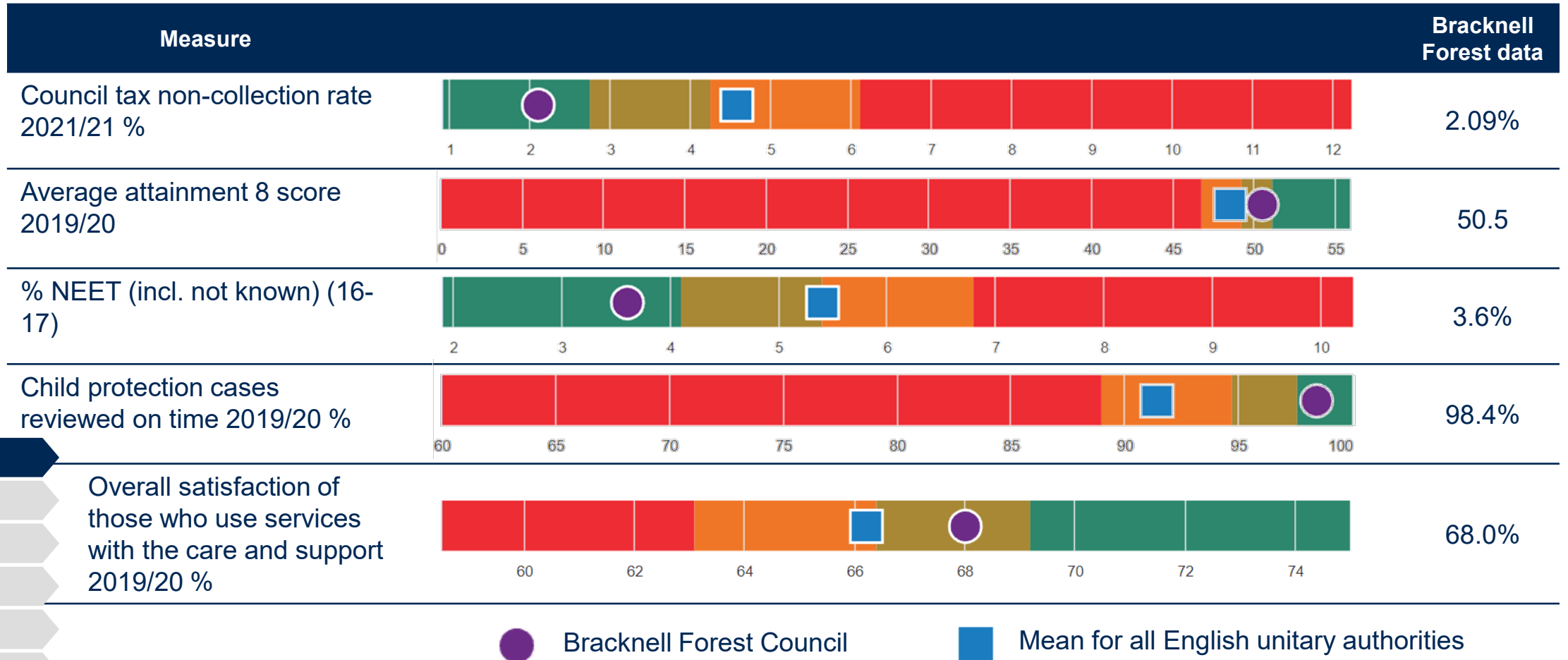
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# Organisation overview

Overall, many services across the council perform well, this is reflected in the LGA's headline dashboard. Several examples below demonstrate the council's effective delivery of services and support for the community.



Full report: <https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/view/lga-research/lga-research-report-headline-report-dashboards>

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# 1. Local priorities and outcomes

The Council Plan sets out the key objectives for 2019 – 2023. It is based upon the pledges made to residents in the 2019 local election. The overriding objective is split into six strategic themes.

***“A key objective is to ensure that Bracknell Forest stays prosperous and remains a good place to live, work and play.”***

Each service area outlines its priorities in delivering the council plan through [annual service plans](#), with progress reported every quarter.

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The priorities in the Council Plan guide the work of the organisation and shape the decision making that takes place.

Several of the current priorities are outlined in the following pages along with the outcomes that have been achieved.



# Council Plan Progress

Despite the impact of the pandemic, progress has continued to be made across all the Council Plan themes. [Quarterly monitoring](#) shows that the majority of actions prioritised for the year have continued.



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*Status of actions at end of March 2021*



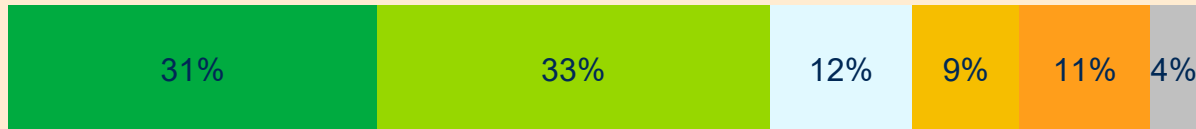
# Resident engagement

The council commissions a residents' survey every three years to seek local feedback on the services provided by the council and the priorities of residents. During the pandemic, the frequency of these surveys has been increased to ensure the council understands the changing circumstances in the borough.

The most recent surveys were conducted in August 2020 and May 2021. A representative sample was contacted based on population demographics.

## Satisfaction with contact with council

May 2021

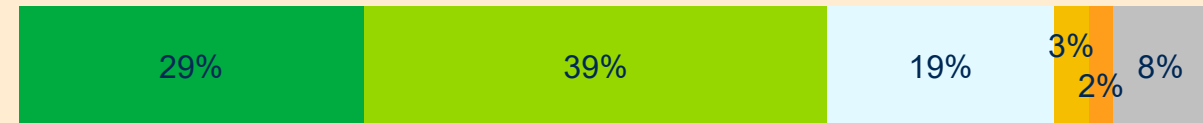


■ Excellent ■ Good ■ Fair ■ Poor ■ Very Poor ■ Don't Know

Residents reported a high level of satisfaction in their contact with the council. With 64% rating it as excellent or good. This compares with a national average of 67% satisfaction for their council's approach (LGA Feb 2021). Residents with a disability were more likely to give an excellent rating to their contact with the council.

## Satisfaction with the council's support during the pandemic

May 2021



■ Very Satisfied ■ Satisfied ■ Neither ■ Fairly Dissatisfied ■ Very Dissatisfied ■ Don't Know

More than two thirds of residents reported being satisfied with the support the council offered during the pandemic. This is higher than the average of 53% satisfaction reported by the LGA in February 2021. Residents who had shielded were more likely than other residents to be satisfied about the way the council supported the community. Only 5% of residents were dissatisfied with the council's response.

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# Growth priority: town centre

Growth is ingrained within the borough's history, with Bracknell at the heart, as a first generation, post war new town. Since the 1990s there has been a focus on the regeneration of the town centre. Plans were revised with the financial crash of 2008 – 2012 but the new ambitious plans delivered the opening of the award winning The Lexicon shopping and leisure destination in 2017 along with the recent upgrades to the Princess Square indoor shopping area in 2020. Throughout these times, the council has been in a central position, working in partnership with Legal & General and Schroders.

The development continues with major projects due to start shortly.



## Bracknell Forest Cambium Partnership

The partnership between the council and Countryside Partnerships Ltd is currently working on the redevelopment of Coopers Hill, land next to The Point on Market Street and the Central Depot. Other sites will come forward through the partnership in the future.





# Growth priority: town centre reactivation

The council's strong partnership with The Lexicon led to the delivery of a summer event of regional significance in the town centre. This aimed to aid recovery from the pandemic and demonstrate the council's ongoing ambition and support for businesses and residents. The event included working closely with retailers and restaurants to increase footfall and dwell time.

The centre pieces of the event were the three Bracknell Forest Giants, each giant had story to tell about the preservation and conservation of the forests surrounding the town. This reflects that 40% of the borough's landscape is forest. The event involved many activities, including the Forest Friends' Den Theatre, Tales and Trails, roaming trees and a band playing songs of the forest.



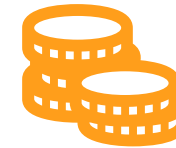
Retailers saw sales uplift vs 2019



Footfall vs 2020



120k+ Interactions



£7,562 Raised for charity

"We loved the Town Square Trail and then decided to come back to see the stilt walkers!"

"I love the trees! My daughter really liked that moving her hand makes them talk!"

"The skill and artistry of the statues makes you want to stand there for hours admiring them."

"My favourite part of this incredible collaboration is the sense of inclusion for special education needs and disability. This magical live story telling session offers a relaxed SEND atmosphere for guests. As a special needs mum, this means a lot to me."

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# Growth priority: borough wide

The borough is a rapid area for housing growth with a minimum of 615 houses per year currently being planned for and delivered. Following public consultation, a new Local Plan is ready for submission, which will deliver 10,000 homes to Bracknell Forest up to 2037.

A key part of the Local Plan is a new garden village on the site at Jealott's Hill, a site currently within the Metropolitan Green Belt. This offers significant potential for developing a space to live and work, around an existing and thriving agri-tech sector, currently operated by Syngenta. The plan needs to demonstrate the 'exceptional circumstances' as to why the land should be removed from the Green Belt and this is likely to be a focus of any forthcoming examination of the plan. The exceptional circumstances centre around the nationally significant research work currently being undertaken at the site and the requirement to retain this facility and sector in the borough and the wider UK. This allocation is of significant importance to the future of the borough, but poses a risk to the overall delivery of the Local Plan.





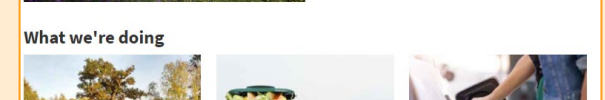
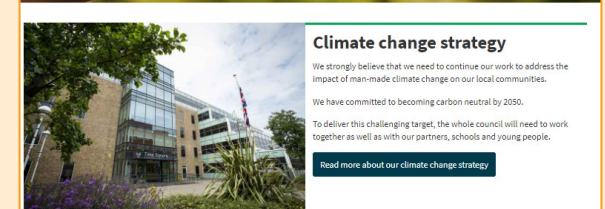
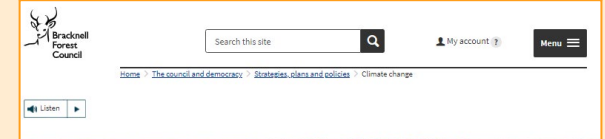
# Climate change priority

The council is committed to tackling climate change and play its part in keeping global warming under 1.5 degrees, the target set in the Paris Agreement and agreed its own Climate Change Strategy in 2020. The approach stretches across every team in the council, ensuring that consideration is always taken for the climate.

Climate change actions cover all portfolios and are coordinated by the Executive Member for the Environment. However, she is supported in this by wider groups of councillors and the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Commission is exploring this topic as one of its key themes. The principles of the council's strategy were tested in public which led to the launch of the strategy and 43 point action plan in February 2021. This also led to the Leader setting up the Climate Change Advisory Panel to support the Executive Members in developing the policy directions the council should take.

Every decision report should now consider how proposals affect climate change. A staff board is also in place to drive forward the work and an audit took place in August 2021 to review the work. The council held a climate change market place in 2020, showcasing the work underway. All these actions intend to integrate a positive approach to climate change in all aspects of the council's work and ensure there is a long term, sustainable approach.

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# Climate change priority

Key achievements include:

The greening of our waste strategy to reduce the amount of waste that goes to landfill. During the first six months of food waste collections, over 3,100 tonnes of food waste has been diverted from landfill. Participation in the food waste recycling scheme is at 90%, much higher than the 60% national average.

The council has been working to improve the homes of residents, retrofitting wall insulation and replacing boilers to make them more efficient. The council has also been awarded grant funding from Salix as part of their phase two decarbonisation scheme. The £154,000 grant will enable all of the council's properties to have a heat decarbonisation plans produced to propose options for decarbonising and saving energy within future schemes. This funding supplements the £775,000 previously awarded and implemented through phase one of Salix's scheme earlier in 2021.

Since April 2021, all electricity in the council's estate has been sourced renewably. In October 2021, the council's sustainable energy officer was awarded the South East Energy Efficiency Award for her work with the most vulnerable in the community, assessing what the council can do to help them and implementing plans to get work completed.

Whilst the council is continuing to prioritise climate change, fully achieving the ambitions will require the combined efforts of national government, businesses and the community. This will unlock more of the levers and therefore benefits of action.



[Link to video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZaMuXDCu30c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZaMuXDCu30c)

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# COVID-19 recovery priorities

Based on the information gathered about the changing impacts of the pandemic, the Executive agreed a set of priorities in 2020 to guide the council's decision making and recovery and renewal. This reflected the need to adapt and re-prioritise in light of the impact of the pandemic on the community. It was clear that financial pressures were likely to increase and that decision making must reflect this. The overarching priority continues to be the health and economic wellbeing of residents.

Against this context, the council agreed the following **recovery and renewal principles**.



Work with partners and communities to protect and promote the **physical and mental health** of our population



Support **town and neighbourhood centre vitality** and try to support our local economy by retaining businesses within the area



Provide short term support and refocus some activities to deal with any **spikes in demand**



Integrate **services with partners** and try to locate them within the community that uses them



Try to involve the **community and voluntary sector** in supporting people and services

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We will do this while also:

- Containing and **reducing our expenditure** in the long term (including refocussing, delivering differently or stopping some services)
- Maximising opportunities to address **carbon reduction**

This framework guided decision making and initiatives through the pandemic and for future work. It was based on the original [‘pillars of decision making’](#). Examples of the outcomes include the council's community response and growth in financial hardship support.



# COVID-19 outcomes: community response

At the start of the pandemic, the community response was established as a partnership between the council, Involve (the community and volunteer umbrella organisation) and The Ark. This aimed to support residents who were shielding, self-isolating or who were vulnerable for another reason, to access basic supplies if they were without friends or family to help. The community response supported people with: welfare checks; information, advice and guidance; food shopping; prescription collection and delivery; and dog walking. Whilst much of this was scaled back after August 2020, activity resumed over the winter when national restrictions were in place again.

Since the community response started, almost 2,500 individuals have been directly supported across the borough. During this time, more than 7,500 tasks have been completed, most were for residents registered as shielding (77%) and were therefore following the government guidance to remain at home. Over 1,500 residents volunteered to support the community response and over 500 are still active.

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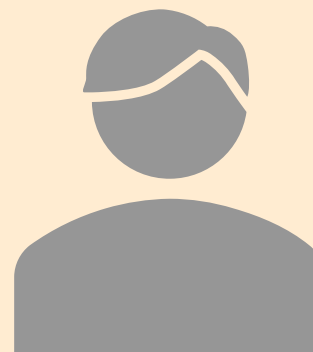
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## Resident feedback



“I have been called to see if I need anything and have been overwhelmed with the concern for my wellbeing. I feel less isolated, less alone and feel there is always someone there for me at the end of the phone. I have had help with walking my dog Buddy, and also a volunteer took my glasses to be fixed and had this done within two hours. I am very grateful and feel that the help I have received has eased my loneliness. The volunteering is a brilliant service.”

“The volunteers have been amazing – helped with food shopping, medication pick-ups and anything else within reason. We request whatever we need over the phone and they let us know if it is possible. Someone is about seven days a week and always willing to help and we have found the service astounding. Top marks. Polite staff and volunteers, quick, courteous and efficient.”



# COVID-19 outcomes: financial hardship and welfare

## Case Study: The Imagination Library

The pandemic has had a significant negative impact on families; under 5s' support groups were not able to operate and nurseries and learning activities were disrupted. School readiness has been reported nationally to be much lower for September 2021 and this is disproportionately affecting some groups of children. Therefore, launching this scheme was a priority to reduce the risk of the pandemic disadvantaging these young children long-term.

Since the scheme launched in May 2021, more than 175 children have been registered. These are children under five who are from low income families or who are working with the council's social care or early help teams. They are funded to receive a free book every month until the child turns five.

Initial parent feedback is demonstrating some of the positive impacts:

“ English is my second language, so it's good to receive books that are the right age for my children. ”

Parent of a three year-old

“ The books have meant the siblings spend more time together. My older sons, age seven and eight, now read the books too and join in reading to their little brother. ”

Parent of a four year-old

Since November 2020, a Financial Hardship Group has operated, building on the existing work within services and unify the approach. The focus of the group is to address the increasing risk of financial hardship for the community due to the pandemic. Councillors have also been involved in this agenda through a cross-party advisory group. Initiatives were coordinated by the group including the distribution of £550,000 as part of the national COVID Winter Grant and COVID Local Support Grant schemes.

The council's 2021/22 budget included reducing council tax bills for all households receiving council tax support by £150, continuing the previous year's national scheme. The council also dedicated £300,000 in the 2021/22 budget specifically for projects related to welfare and COVID recovery. This has funded projects including:

- The Dolly Parton Imagination Library, a book delivery scheme for children under five.
- Additional school holiday vouchers for low income families during the summer holidays.
- The children's social care emergency assistance fund for essential welfare support at home.

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## 2. Governance and culture



There has been significant changes to the council's working culture due to the pandemic. Working from home has affected how the workforce perceive their teams and working environment. Through the most recent staff survey, many have reported that the home working had a positive impact for their work and wellbeing. However, it was also clear that this change didn't benefit everyone. There has been a focus for the last 18 months to reflect on the workplace culture to maximise the learning from the pandemic.



The council operates a Leader and Executive model including a significant number of decisions being made by individual Executive Members. To ensure wider councillor engagement in policy development, the Leader has established a number of cross party Advisory Panels (for example, the Climate Change Advisory Panel), many of which meet in public and make recommendations to the Executive or Council. This enables input from additional councillors and reflects the council's culture of involvement and transparent decision making.

In addition, the majority group has agreed an innovative process for consultation on forthcoming Executive decisions to strengthen their internal consultation processes. These Portfolio Review Groups (PRGs) meet in advance of every Executive meeting. The focus of PRGs is on engagement within the majority group rather than holding the Executive to account or acting as critical friend, which remains within the overview and scrutiny function.

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# Recent approach



Decision making and leadership during the pandemic has presented new challenges and required significant leadership from Executive Members and staff. The format of meetings had to change from in person to using video conferencing. To ensure that the statutory decision making requirements were met, more use was made of individual Executive Member decision making and increased delegations to officers. To ensure members were kept fully engaged in the council's response to the pandemic, the chief executive undertook twice weekly briefings for all members from March 2020 to February 2021, these then became weekly and continue to take place every fortnight. The council will continue to focus on enhancing councillor engagement and inclusion as part of the recovery from the pandemic.



There will be political changes as part of the 2021 ward boundary review which will take effect from May 2023, when the council will reduce from 42 to 41 councillors and each councillor will represent more electors. The ward pattern will alter and the number of wards will reduce. As Bracknell Forest has a number of councillors who have represented the same wards for many years, this will require good communication with our residents so they understand the changes.

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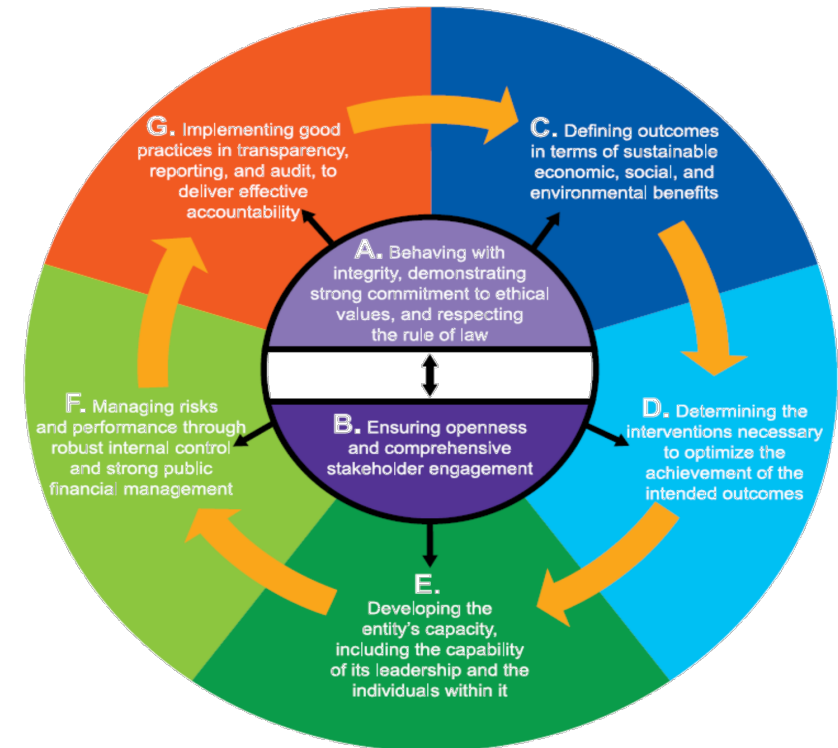
# Governance framework

The council publishes an annual governance statement detailing the processes and systems which give assurance for the effectiveness of the council's discharge of its responsibilities.

The governance framework underpins the council's activity to engage and lead the community with accountability. The diagram below shows the components of the framework.



## Achieving the Intended Outcomes While Acting in the Public Interest at all Times



The annual report reviews how each element of the framework interacts with the seven CIPFA Principles of Good Governance. The monitoring officer assesses how the council meets each outcome.

# Political structure

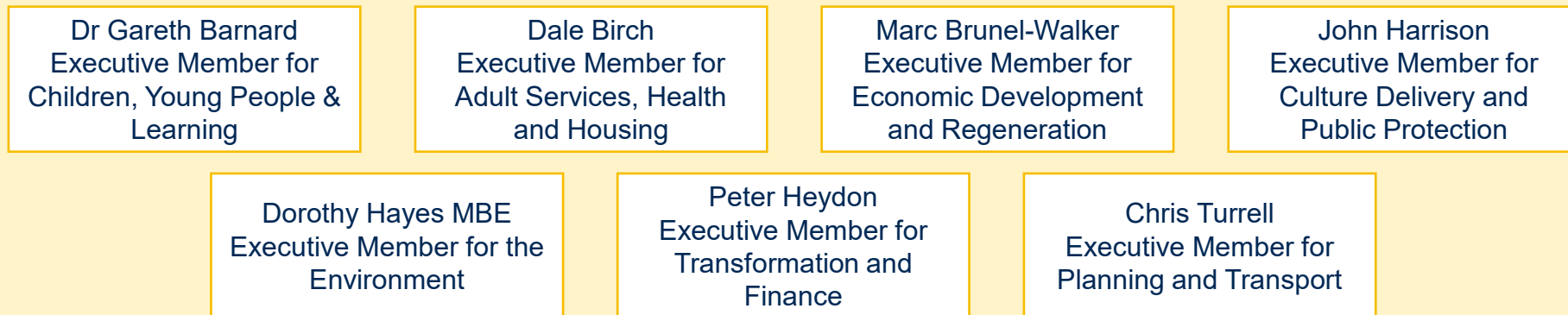
## Full Council

42 Bracknell Forest Councillors



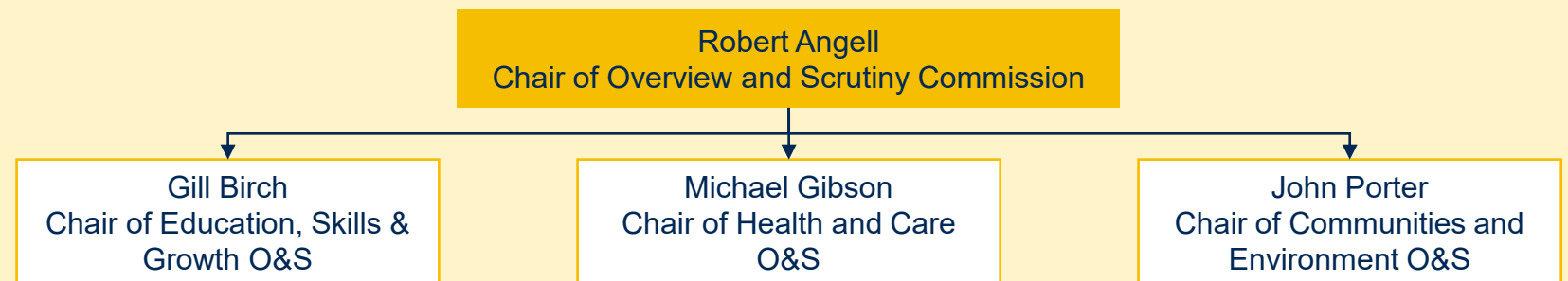
Cllr Paul Bettison OBE  
Executive Member for Council Strategy & Community Cohesion

## Executive



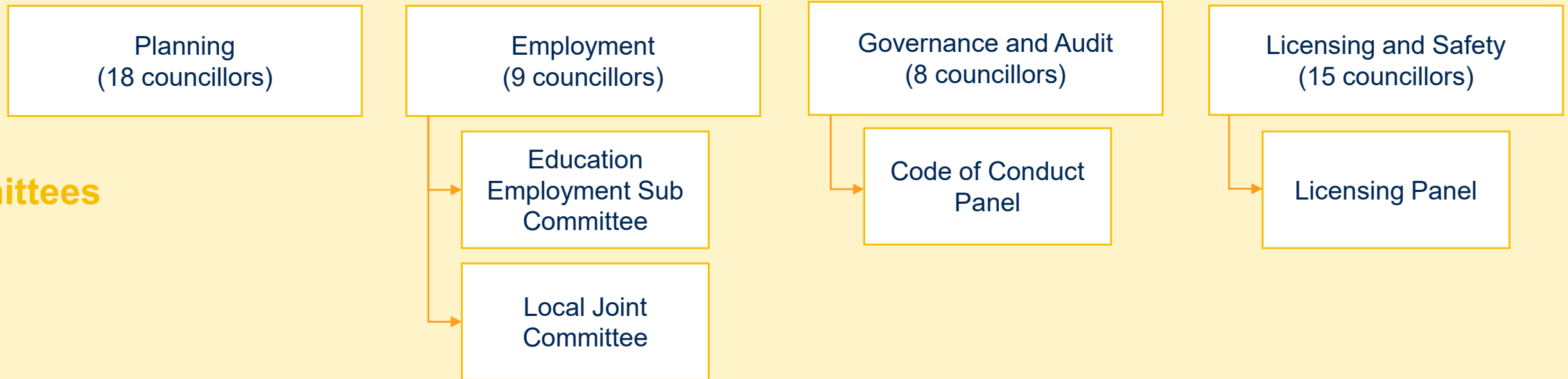
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## Overview and Scrutiny



# Political structure

## Committees



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The work of the Governance and Audit Committee gives assurance to our governance controls and the committee's process. They also work with officers to undertake deep dives into the risk registers, exceeding the statutory minimum requirements. Every one of the council's wards is represented on the Planning Committee, which has a long standing process in place for public participation.



# Partnership Working

The council has adopted an innovative approach in a number of areas by working with other authorities in a number of joint decision making processes, which is not replicated in most other authorities. These include the Joint Waste Disposal Board and Public Protection Partnership Joint Committee.

The council is also fully engaged in a number of significant partnership working arrangements, including: the Health and Wellbeing Board, Local Outbreak Engagement Board and Bracknell Forest Civilian Military Partnership.

The whole of Bracknell Forest area is parished and the council has good liaison arrangements in place with the six parish and town councils.



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# Members and development

The council recognises the importance of learning and development to deliver good public services. The councillor [development strategy](#) provides a framework for the council to deliver effective member learning and development. The strategy sets out the guiding principles and subsequent actions to be delivered by the Councillor Development Charter Steering Group, councillors and officers. The Councillor [Development Annual Report](#) reflects on the success of 2020/21, including the adjustment to remote meetings, training sessions undertaken and the introduction of councillor blogs. The council has been reaccredited with Charter Plus status in recognition of the standard of support provided.

One part of councillors' continual development is linked to governance and risk management. The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) has designed a Governance and Risk Resilience Framework to support individual council officers and councillors to play their part in identifying, understanding, and acting on, risks to good governance. The council has arranged two training sessions with the CfGS in November 2021 to focus on how the framework encourages discussion and reflection on governance, and to think about what steps need to be taken to act on emerging governance risks.

## Member development in numbers



# Overview and Scrutiny

The Overview and Scrutiny function was re-modelled in 2019, taking account of the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) review into the function, the Government's new Statutory Guidance and the council's reorganisation. The objective was to move away from the direct scrutiny of individual departments and to focus on holding the Executive to account for the decisions and actions that affect their communities, monitoring the progress of delivery against the Council Plan and discharging its statutory duties in relation to crime and disorder as well as health.

The Overview and Scrutiny Commission coordinates the work of three Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Panels, acknowledging that activity is most effective when delivered as task and finish style review activity, and a new work programme was developed. These panels moved from having service specific portfolios to align with the Council Plan's strategic themes.



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An [annual report](#) is published, reviewing the recent work conducted and the outcomes of the panels. The latest report reflects a period slightly longer than a year due to the restructure. Achievements from 2019-21 include the O&S response to tackling climate change and increased councillor and public engagement.



# Overview and Scrutiny

The last 18 months have presented an ongoing challenge to work with services and partners to maintain a deliverable O&S work programme whilst responding to changes in their capacity due to COVID-19 activities. This has meant that the work programme has been refocused and rescheduled to support service activity.

## Recently completed reviews

### Blue badges

A review into the application process for blue badges and, in particular, outcomes for residents with non-visible disabilities

### Care leavers

A review into support provided to care leavers in terms of housing, education, jobs and accommodation

### Food waste in flats and HMOs

A review of the options for food waste collection for houses of multiple occupation and flats

## Current reviews

### **Mental health**

A review focusing on the improvement of mental health services through early intervention, community and self-help prevention measures, with particular focus on access, referrals and engagement.

### **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)**

A review of how CIL funding is used for community projects.

## Future reviews

- Resident parking (Q3 21/22)
- SEND (Q3 21/22)
- Integrated enforcement (Q1 22/23)
- County Lines (Q1 22/23)
- Governors (Q3 22/23)
- Evaluation of work programme (Q3 22/23)

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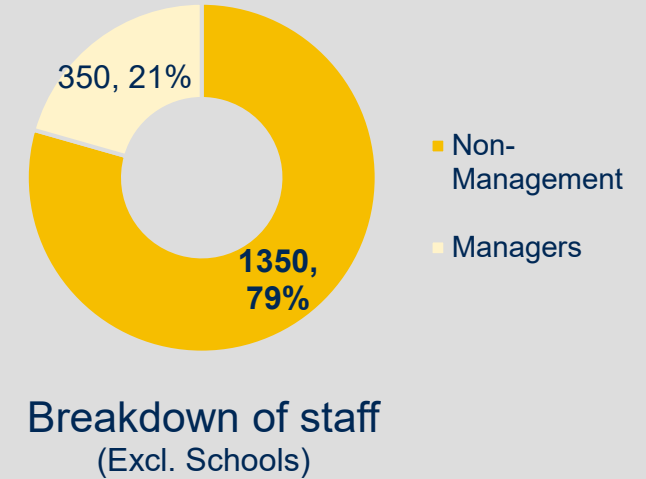
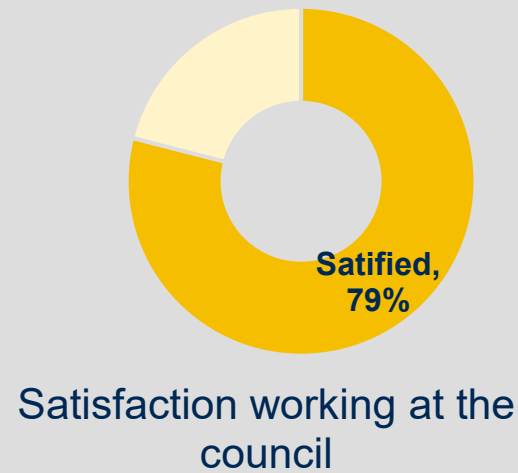
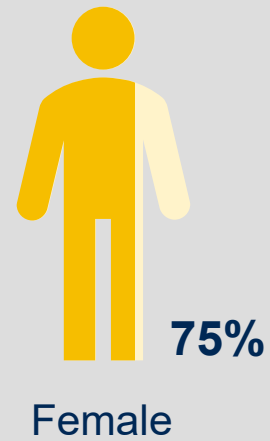
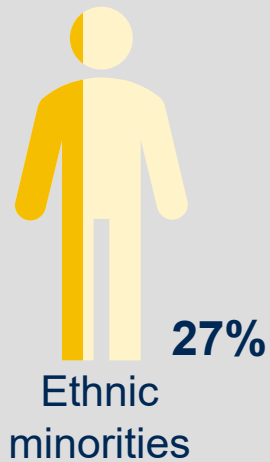
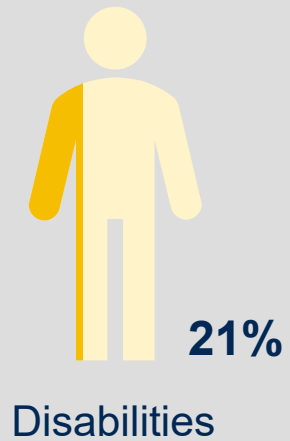
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# Our workforce



Time Square is the main office and pre-pandemic it contained 700 desks and was home to 1,100 staff. The pandemic has placed a number of pressures on the workforce, such as continuing to manage the work-life balance, particularly with the challenges of working from home. For most of 2020 and Q1 2021, Time Square was staffed by only 25 or so individuals providing emergency services that required a physical presence.

Quarterly surveys carried out during the government restrictions enabled the council to identify and address the critical concerns such as providing access to suitable equipment for home working, managing time spent at the computer and addressing issues of loneliness and isolation.

In response, the council developed an Agile Working Policy which sets out the approach to ensure that everyone can strike the right work-life balance depending on their unique set of circumstances. Employee feedback included the aspiration to have much better relationships with line managers and vice versa. The ambition is to recognise and remove the barriers that often prevent these relationships such as form focused performance appraisals, a lack of clear performance objectives and not tackling concerns at the earliest opportunity.

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# A new HR and OD Strategy: An employer of choice

The previous 2017 to 2020 HR/OD Strategy focused on developing the capacity and skills for workforce planning. Whilst the strategy took significant steps to help managers think more long term about their resourcing requirements, the council recognised there were still areas for improvement.

The council has since made a commitment to build on the learning from the pandemic, invest in building high quality people management and address challenges around equality and discrimination. A new strategy has now been developed based on insights from the Absence of Malice research 2020, the employee engagement survey 2019, wellbeing and resilience surveys (throughout 2019 – 2021) and workshops with staff and managers. Key themes reflected in the strategy are: increasing people management skills, developing an HR function for the future, tackling critical recruitment and retention issues and ensuring an environment and culture is created where equality and diversity are valued and embraced.

The repositioning of the HR and OD team in driving delivery of the strategy was key, therefore the team has adopted a new operating approach, designed to support managers to confidently create the conditions where everyone can perform

at their best. This is being achieved through coaching, simplifying HR policies and processes and placing much more emphasis on relationships and performance rather than compliance and responding to poor performance.

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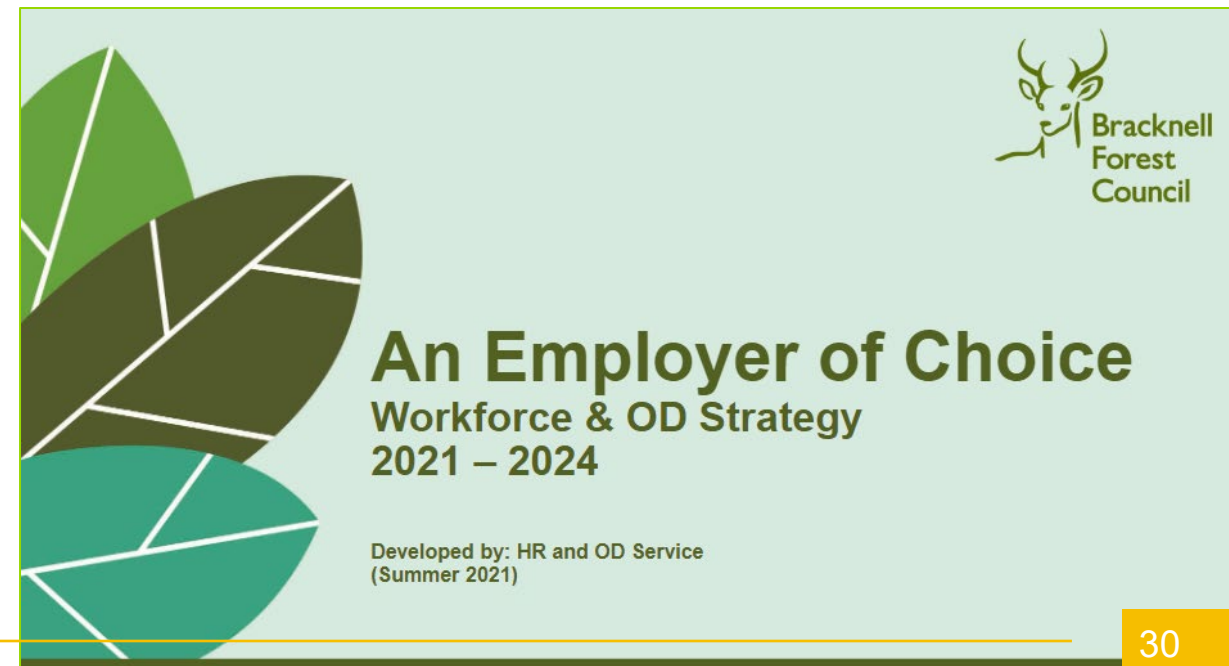
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# Since January 2021

There has already been substantial progress towards these aims, with the following work underway:

- Restructured the HR/OD service introducing a new operating model to focus on building people management capacity and confidence
- Established a council wide HR/OD steering group
- Redesigned the performance appraisal process and trained over 450 staff and managers
- Completed a council wide skills audit with a learning and development strategy in design
- Developed a people management competency framework with a planned development programme due to be delivered late Autumn 2021
- Delivered Mindful and Compassionate leadership training to over 150 managers
- Delivered Inclusive Conversations training with members and now rolling out across all managers
- Introduced a new Agile Working Policy with Managing Attendance, Dignity at Work and Equalities Policy currently under review
- Established a new resourcing team to tackle the recruitment and retention challenges, including in social care
- Introduced new hybrid working arrangements
- Developing and launching a new recruitment software system
- Reviewing our approach to pay and reward including job evaluation
- Supported the recruitment of over 20 Equality Allies

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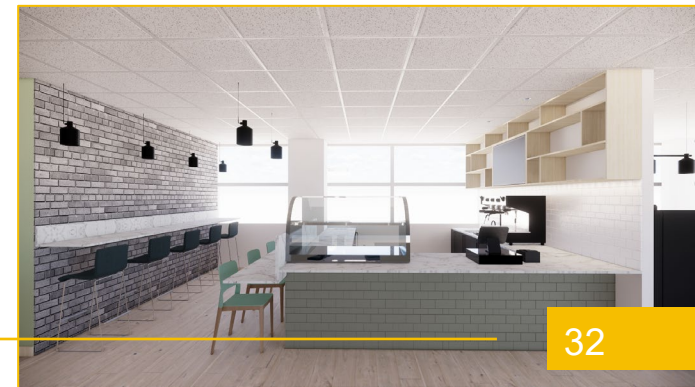
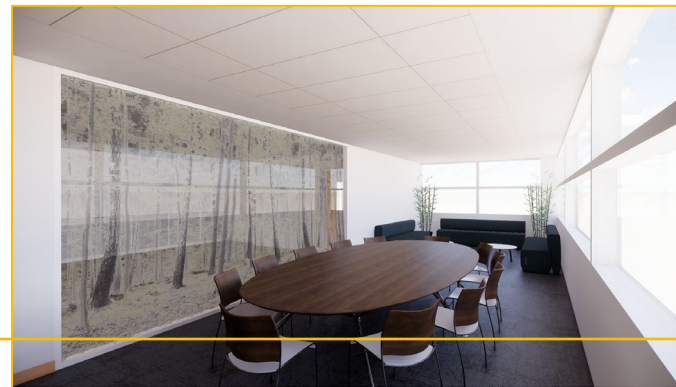
# Ways of Working

The pandemic has created a significant shift in how the council and staff operate, including linked to the technology for working. Most staff worked from home during the pandemic, and many reflected on the benefits of this. Therefore, the council will maintain its endorsement for staff to work remotely most of the time, where operational service delivery allows. This has been supported with policy changes and structural changes are also now underway.

With more staff working from home more often, this has released available office space. Therefore, the main Time Square office is being transformed to improve the collaboration and community space. This aligns with the ambition to increasing working with partners and will encourage a permanent transition to more flexible working. The introduction of flexible space also enhances the community focus in the town centre, rather than the existing municipal office.

The new Time Square office space will feature a café/refreshment facilities on the ground floor and an increased number of collaboration rooms. Space on the ground and first floor will be rented to partner organisations such as the CCG, and the voluntary and community sector.

*Artist impressions for Time Square*



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# Culture of equality and inclusion

One aspect of staff culture that has been a focus over recent years has been equality, diversity and inclusion. The council has actively sought to understand employee perspectives and improve the opportunities to discuss and raise awareness.

1 2017 and 2019 staff surveys both showed that a quarter of staff had experienced workplace discrimination in the last year.

CMT commissioned internal and academic research: *The Absence of Malice, 2020*. 2

It identified that often the discrimination was not intentional but it was happening throughout the organisation. Staff reported that there wasn't enough action to tackle the issue.

3 CMT sponsored a series of specific actions, including a new equalities scheme and action plan.

Examples of recent actions include the launch of the Equality Allies scheme, the development of an updated Equalities Policy, roll out of inclusive conversations training, and launching a Members' Equalities Working Group. 4

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## Case Study: Equality Allies

Whilst the role of managers and HR are vital in reducing discrimination in the workplace. The evidence of The Absence of Malice research showed that staff still sometimes felt disadvantaged due to their age, gender or race.

Therefore, the Officer Equality Group developed proposals to launch a new staff support network. More than 25 staff volunteered across different directorates and management levels during the August 2021 launch. Their role is to make sure that every staff member has someone to speak to confidentially if they want to raise an issue related to equality or discrimination. Any staff member can now find the Equality Allies online and reach out to them to discuss an issue.

The allies have benefitted from additional training related to equality, diversity and inclusion to support their development. Launching the programme has further increased the conversations taking place about equality and has enhanced the engagement across the organisation.



# Leadership and management

A key priority for the council has been supporting managers with adapting to the pandemic and managing teams remotely. This has been a challenging change and the recent skills survey provided insights into the core skills gaps for managers and leaders. One of the most critical areas is managing performance, setting performance targets and holding people to account. Hence this is now an area of focus for management development, around the expected behaviours, skills and knowledge to achieve high quality people management. This includes understanding how to work within the political and legal frameworks of the council such as political decision making, scrutiny and governance as well as how to make sound financial decisions using and managing the budgetary controls each manager has.

In response to this feedback, the OD team has been working with key stakeholder groups to develop the Bracknell Forest Manager Framework. The framework will be used to commission a programme of development which will be mandatory for all leaders and managers.

In addition, the HR team has simplified many of the policies and processes, encouraging timely and informed decisions.

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# Growing our own

As part of the council's new approach to resourcing, a resourcing team has been established with the aim of ensuring that the council has the right medium and long-term plan for resourcing whilst addressing the immediate challenges. This includes initiatives designed to help grow talent in-house such as the apprenticeship programme, kickstart placements, school placements, Step Up to Social Work programme.

The council's school staff currently make significant use of the apprenticeship levy, upskilling future headteachers, deputies and wider skills. The council has also started a management MBA programme with New Bucks University which was offered to the management and leadership cohort. Currently, several apprentices are in situ from social care to business admin and the aim is to increase this through encouraging managers to explore this option prior to formal recruitment.

Bracknell Forest Council continues to participate in the Local Government Association's, [National Graduate Development Programme](#) and has successfully placed all previous trainees into permanent roles. Two further National Management Trainees have been recruited to start at the end of September 2021. This scheme has been successful in securing talented recruits.

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As part of the social care resourcing project, the council will be exploring ways to reduce agency staff by exploring alternative training and recruitment pathways, such as developing routes into social work and social care from some of our existing disadvantaged groups, for example people recently unemployed due to COVID, care leavers, ex-military and the Kickstart Programme. These schemes do not offer 'quick fix' solutions to the existing recruitment and resourcing challenges, but encourage a stable and skilled supply of staff in the years to come.



# 3. Organisational and place leadership

Leadership in Bracknell Forest has benefited from significant stability in senior management and political direction. This has fostered a strong partnership between officers and members and has encouraged relationships across the community to develop. New members of the corporate management team have also brought additional approaches and insights.

One success of leadership across Place has been the establishment and retention of the Frimley ICS. This was formed at the forefront of Integrated Care Systems in England, emphasising the local ambition for joined up working. The publication in February 2021 of the Healthcare White Paper (Working Together to Improve Health and Social Care for All) raised the opportunity to reform the local ICS. This would improve coterminosity but would have caused significant disruption to the community and would risk poorer outcomes.

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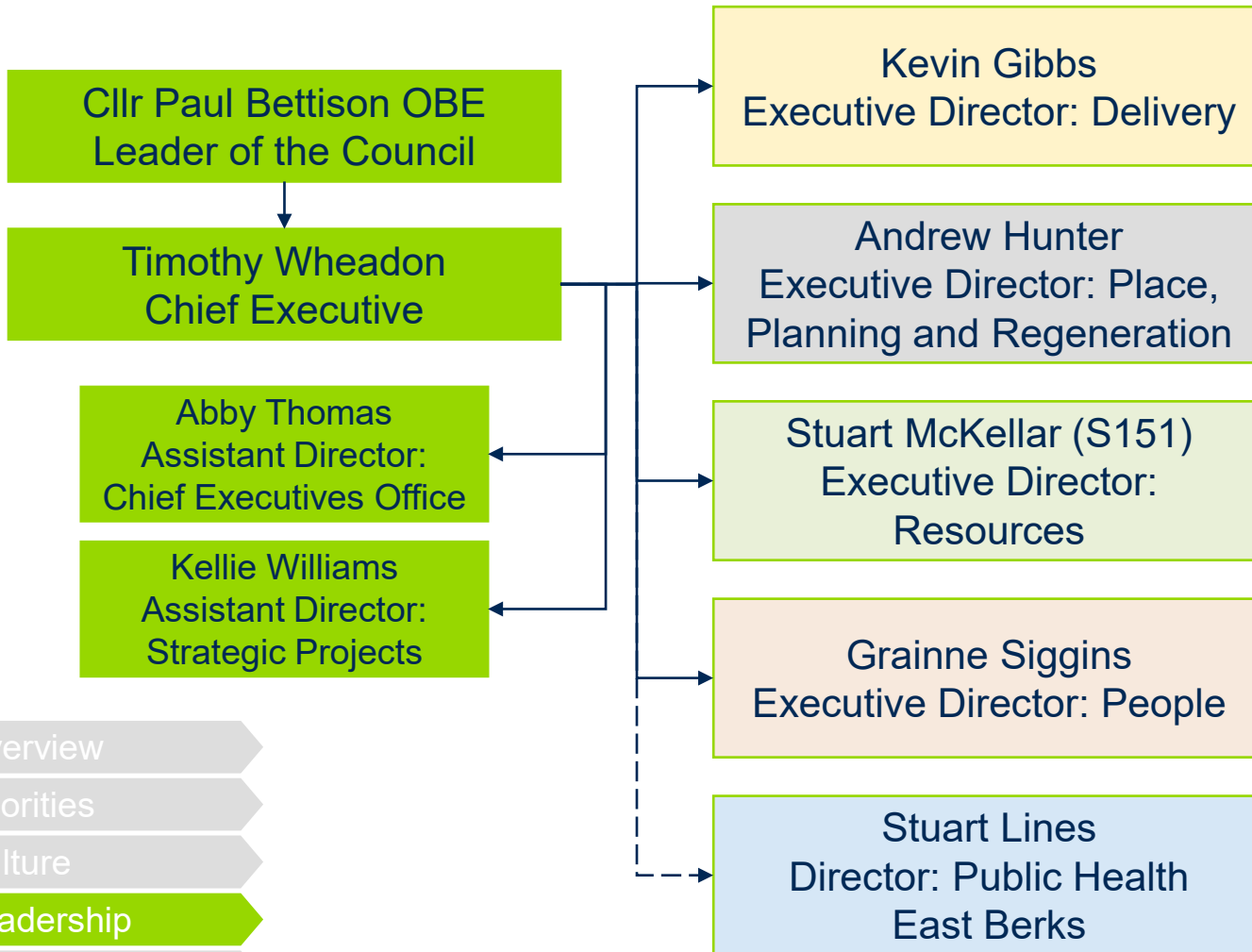
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The council was central to these conversations with the Secretary of State and partners, and held the position to retain Frimley ICS. Through working with neighbouring authorities, the position was presented and ultimately the decision was agreed to retain Frimley ICS. This will encourage better patient outcomes for local residents.



# Organisational Structure



Sanjay Prashar Borough Solicitor	Damian James Assistant Director: Contract Services
Bobby Mulheir Assistant Director: Digital, Customer Experience, & IT	Kamay Toor Assistant Director: Property Services
Max Baker Assistant Director: Planning	Neil Matthews Assistant Director: Highways and Transport
Calvin Orr Head of Finance and Business	Vacancy Assistant Director: Public Health
Paul Young Assistant Director: HR and OD	Arthur Parker Chief Accountant
Melanie O'Rourke Assistant Director: Adult Social Care	Tony Dwyer Assistant Director: Mental Health and Out of Hours
Cheryl Eyre Assistant Director: Education and Learning	Sonia Johnson Assistant Director: Childrens Services
Sarah Gee Assistant Director: Early Help and Communities	Thom Wilson Assistant Director: Commissioning

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# Leadership Groups

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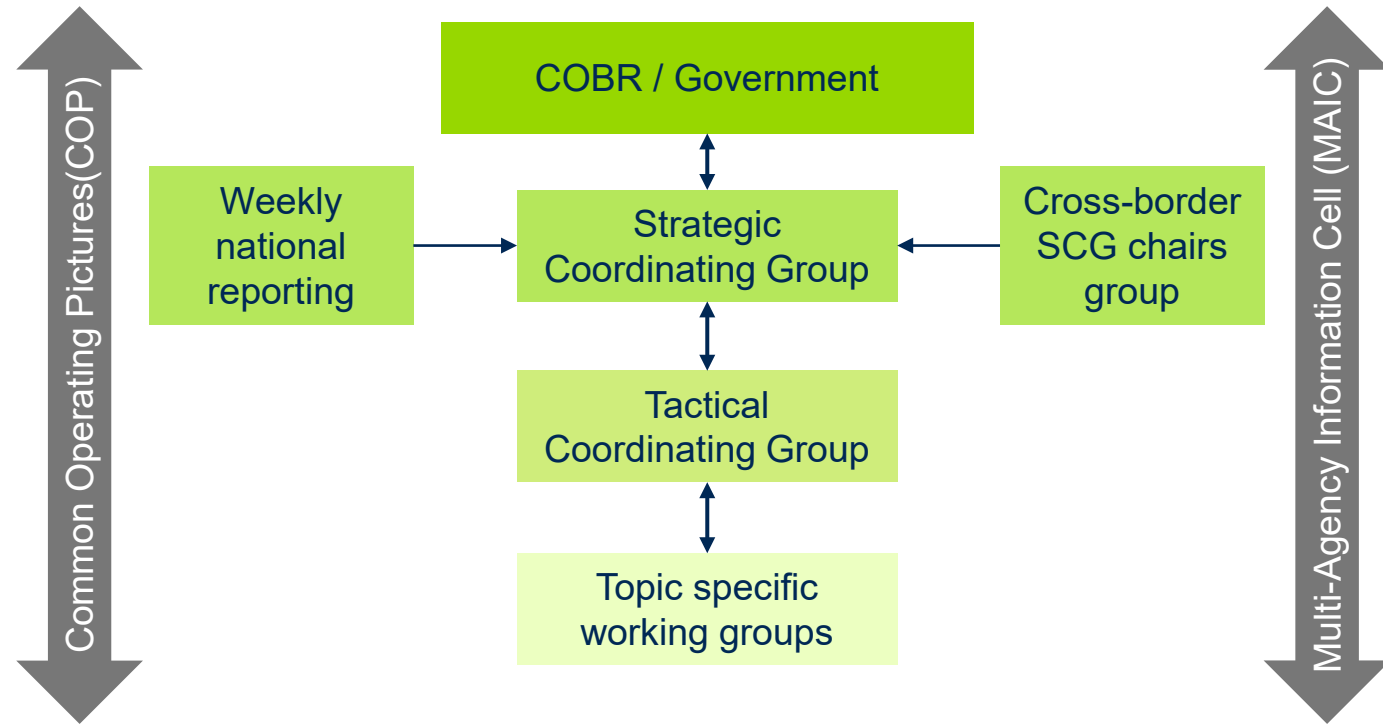
There is a well-established system for officer governance. Regular meetings take place for disseminating information, strategic planning and decision making.

This structure is supported by a wider range of specialist groups and partnerships such as the Place Committee, Health and Wellbeing Board, Bracknell Town Centre Regeneration Committee and the Schools Forum. Many of these include external stakeholders and wider engagement with the community.

# Leadership through crisis

During the pandemic, the usual leadership processes were adapted to allow rapid, agile decision making. A number of structures were in place to keep the council's decision makers informed and to feedback concerns and issues.

CMT met as part of the Gold Command twice weekly supported by Silver Command and task and finish groups, to enable rapid and agile decision making in light of COVID. The council attended the Local Resilience Forum's Tactical Coordinating Group and was represented at the Strategic Coordinating Group.



	Group	Purpose
	Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG)	A strategic multi-agency group including emergency services, NHS leads, councils, military and MHCLG with the remit of coordinating the response across the Thames Valley.
Overview	TVLRF Tactical Coordinating Group (TCG)	A multi-agency group including emergency services, NHS leads, councils, military and MHCLG with the remit of putting in place the actions required by the SCG.
Priorities	TVLRF subgroups	To specifically explore activities relating to their group to develop a plan and ensure the issues are mitigated.
Culture	Berkshire East Health Protection Board	The primary role of the board is the ongoing development and delivery of the Local Outbreak Plan, work with the relevant TV LRF cells, make recommendations to the pan Berkshire Recovery and Response Group on allocation of resources and respond to mutual aid requirements.
Leadership	BFC Gold	The Gold command group was in overall control of the council's resources throughout the pandemic.
Finances	BFC Silver	To ensure the activities in relation to the council's management of COVID-19 are on track, raising any issues to the normal governance structure
Improvement	Recovery group	Role to co-ordinate the council's recovery efforts, oversee the Recovery Strategy and plans and monitor on-going COVID-19 impact
Future		



# Leadership through crisis

In the first few weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic, a framework for decision making was established. This ensured that decisions made across the council's Gold and Silver command could be made quickly and with a consistent approach.



To follow government and Public Health England advice.



To activate business continuity plans to maintain 'non-contact' services as close to normal as possible and to maintain individual contact services in a COVID-19 safe way.



To close services that rely on and/or encourage social mixing.



To work with contractors and partners to ensure we have the capability and capacity to renew services as soon as this is possible.



To prepare for recovery whilst responding to immediate response issues.

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This was then the foundation for the [recovery and renewal principles](#) agreed in June 2020. These guided our actions towards recovery.

# Joint working leadership

*“Community focused collaboration: creating better outcomes through better partnerships”*

Blueprint ambition ‘20

To help the borough go further faster, a vision for joint working was developed between the council and East Berkshire CCG (now Frimley CCG). This explored solutions through the development of a shared approach to commissioning and delivering health and care services to maximise the opportunities for joint working, addressing our priorities, the rising costs of public services and increasing demand on community services, particularly in the context of the pandemic.

The subsequent blueprint in 2020 concluded that there were two main challenges that would be the focus of joint working:

1. The increasing financial pressures and need for cost saving.
2. The changes in how the community is using services and its emerging needs, particularly following the pandemic.

Key areas identified with potential for joint working included the core functions of commissioning, estates and co-location, workforce and budgets.

This work was inevitably held up by the ICS boundary review, however, it is still continuing and there are several joint working projects already underway. A shared director of public health is also now in post across the East Berks CCG footprint, which has further increased alignment.

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## Delivering outcomes

Throughout 2020-2021 the council and the CCG have worked on a number of joint ambitions that will underpin a new Place Plan and have a significant role in implementing the ICS ‘Community Deal’ ambition through partnership working. These include:

- Aligning social care services with Primary Care Networks to allow improved integration of care and health activities.
- Working together to develop a joint community and health facility at Blue Mountain, Binfield.
- Joint working to improve access to residential nursing/dementia care and short term intermediate care through the Heathlands development.
- Transforming the way children’s centres work, transforming them into family support hubs.
- Improving access to services for Children and Young People with Autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Special Educational Needs.
- Developing aligned health and care plans to drive forward integration and address local inequalities.

# Joint working with health

There are multiple examples of strong partnerships with health colleagues. Ambitions are continuing to thrive with the imminent delivery of the Heathlands Health and Care Home and the Blue Mountain Community and Health Care Hub.

One part of this approach has been to establish locality access points (LAP), which were launched in 2020. These were based on the learning and success of the Surrey Heath model. The LAP work by having daily huddles with a community matron, MH practitioner, social workers and intermediate care therapists, reviewing and triaging people in the social care and health system. The model enables multiple services to be mobilised at the same time, which provides a more timely and holistic response, onward navigation to existing teams and smoother escalation where needed. Complex cases can then be triaged to further

integrated cluster groups to connect with wider health and wellbeing experts.

In setting up this approach, extensive partnership working was required, it involved shifting aligning strategic ambitions and decision making. This video outlines the approach and feedback to the work.

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## East Berkshire's Integrated Care System

### Integration in Action

#### East Berkshire's Integrated Care Service

Integration and  
Better Care Fund



[Link to video: https://youtu.be/ffGXhBos-RM](https://youtu.be/ffGXhBos-RM)

# Joint working with health

## Case Study: Heathlands

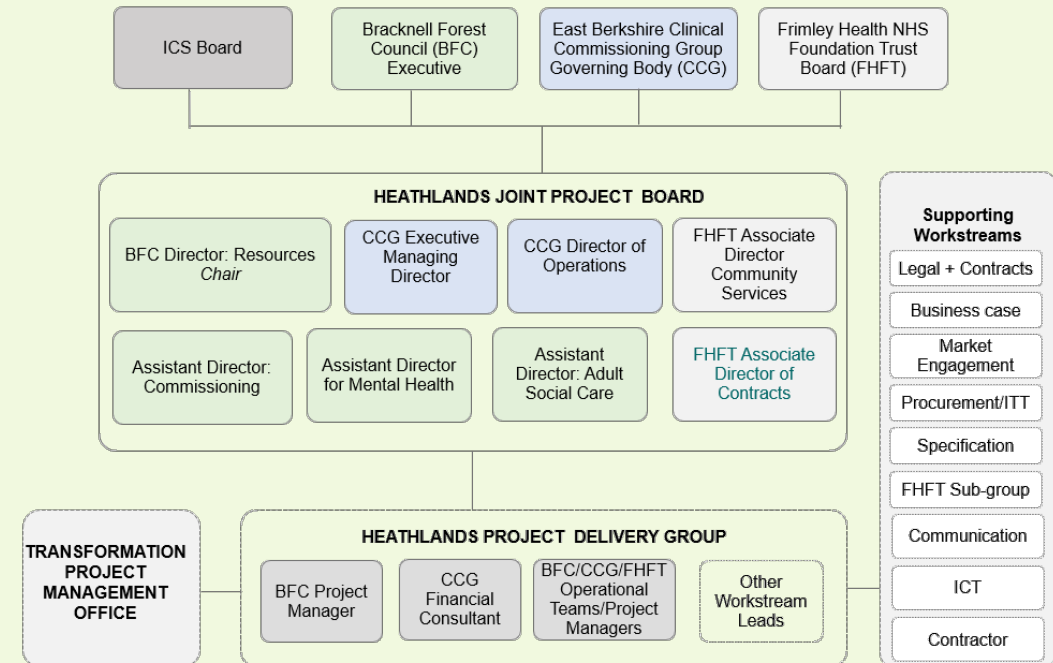
Bracknell Forest Council, the Frimley Clinical Commissioning Group (formerly known as East Berkshire CCG) and Frimley Health Foundation Trust have been working in partnership since 2018 to provide a new facility in Bracknell. This will deliver integrated health and social care services.

The Heathlands facility will contain 20 discharge to assess beds to be used for NHS patients and 46 dementia care beds, which will be commissioned by the council. It is a flagship project, showcasing the benefits of integrated arrangements between social care and health at a local level. It will provide much needed health care and support as well as create new jobs.

The construction is underway and is expected to open in early 2022.



Joint governance has been established to deliver the project. This consists of a partnership board, chaired by the executive director of resources.



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# Leadership spotlight: children's social care

In July 2021, Ofsted completed a focused visit of the council's children's services. The inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for children in need and children subject to a child protection plan.

They reflected that despite changes in leadership, there had continued to be good oversight during the transition period of children and the progress they were making. The inspectors' report identified that the council adapted quickly and effectively when the pandemic began. This meant that the most vulnerable children were better protected. The inspectors concluded that senior leaders and managers have an accurate view of the quality of practice and are informed by

comprehensive performance management information.

One area was highlighted for continued development, linked to the effectiveness of interventions and decision making when working with parents who are resistant to change.

“The council have continued to ensure the delivery of high-quality social work practice that has a positive impact on children's experiences. Corporate leaders within the council have been well sighted on the progress of children, including disabled children, during this time. Effective and responsive partnership work has resulted in sound strategic oversight which permeates through to frontline managers and social workers within children's services.

“At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic the local authority swiftly implemented a clear whole-organisation strategic plan and well-coordinated multi-agency response. This has ensured a consistent response to and delivery of services to children throughout the pandemic.”

*Ofsted report, August 2021*

Following this feedback an action plan has been developed to incorporate the findings and the learning of the service.

Through quality assurance, audit and monitoring, the local authority will continue to review the progress of the action plan delivery and strive to keep all children safe and within the borough.

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# Leadership spotlight: Family Safeguarding Model

The council began transforming its approach to children's social work in 2017, when it embarked on the implementation of the Family Safeguarding Model (FSM) with DfE funding. The essence of the model is a whole family approach with the primary aim of keeping families together, where it is safe to do so, preventing children becoming looked after.

The FSM is a nationally recognised model endorsed by the DfE. The impact of the model in Bracknell Forest was subject to external evaluation along with five other local authorities commissioned by the DfE and carried out by YORK Consulting.

Throughout the first three years there have been sustainability reports to ensure the model has longevity and can be sustainably implemented.

Committing to and implementing this change has led to a number of positive outcomes for local families. Since 2017/18 these include:

- The number of children becoming looked after has reduced significantly
- Missing episodes have reduced by 55%
- Fewer cases have been reaching the threshold for safeguarding practice review notifications

This all has made a substantial difference to the experiences of children and their family relationships. The successful introduction has also created avoidance of pressures for the council and partners.

*“ The evaluation demonstrates that multi-disciplinary working – and specifically the integration of specialist adult workers within social work teams – is the foremost success factor of family safeguarding. It has given families prompter access to specialist input and has provided more joined-up and tailored packages of support. ”*

*YORK Consulting evaluation July 2020*

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# 4. Financial planning and management

The council has spent within its approved budget every year since 1998. In both 2016/17 and 2019/20, in year spending controls were needed to secure this position.

CIPFA's financial resilience index ranks the council at an overall low risk, highlighting the council's good financial management. The council has benefitted from high business rates growth in recent years which presents both a risk and an opportunity.

The 2016 transformation programme successfully delivered its expected overall benefits of £12 million in recurring savings. However, social care budgets have continued to increase each year, reflecting additional demand, complexity and rising costs of care needs. There are believed to be opportunities to manage this through practice changes and closer working with partners such as health, although the scale is currently unclear.

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Looking ahead, a significant loss of income is expected when the current business rates system changes and telecommunications companies are moved to the central list in 2023/24. In anticipation of this situation, a strong financial base has been built, largely helped by Bracknell Forest leading successful Berkshire business rates pilots in 2018/19 and 2019/20. Therefore, there is a significant level of reserves to manage the transition to a new funding situation over several years. The council will need to ensure over time that annual savings are in line with spending pressures, in order to secure a long-term sustainable position.

In addition to an inevitable focus on the large spending areas in children's and adult social care, savings will also be targeted through driving more value from assets such as property and land and identifying opportunities to automate simple, repetitive processes.

# Commercial strategy

The council has invested in property as part of the commercial property investment strategy. Multiple purchases have been made outside the borough since 2016, which provides a regular additional income stream to meet the gaps in central government funding. The investments remain strong and generate more than £3 million per annum in net additional income. This directly funds the council's frontline services.

Now the commercial property investment strategy objectives have been achieved, the focus has moved to the town centre joint venture. In December 2020, Bracknell Forest Council established a joint venture (the Cambium Partnership) with Countryside

Properties Ltd. This partnership will redevelop a number of surplus sites in Bracknell to continue the successful regeneration of Bracknell town centre and to generate additional capital and revenue income.

This approach was agreed after external advisors assessed multiple options. The joint venture allows the council to retain control of assets whilst benefiting from the expertise of a successful commercial developer.

The first phase of the joint venture will be the redevelopment of Coopers Hill. This site will create new homes for families, first time buyers and older people, within walking distance of the town centre. Future sites will include Market Street and Jubilee Gardens.



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# Investing in communities

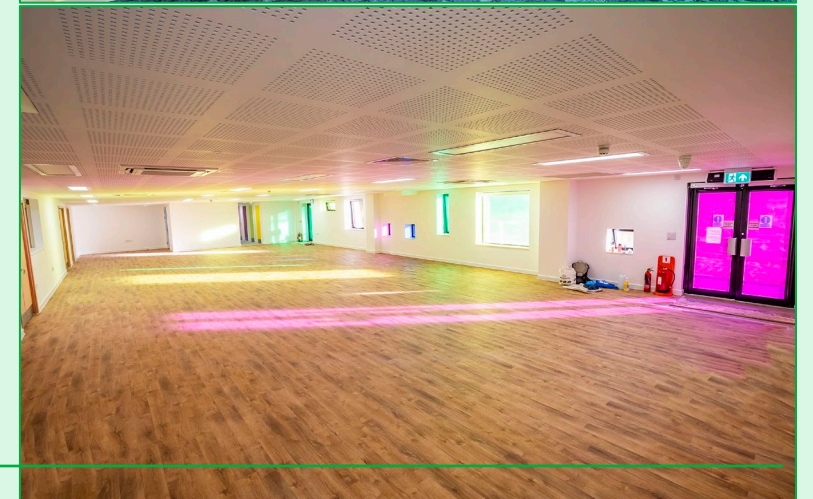
The council has transformed the ground floor of one of the town centre car parks into a modern and colourful youth centre for young people in Bracknell Forest. The transformation of Braccan Walk youth hub is now complete.

Young people from across the borough shaped the plans for the new space. Their involvement, which included usage of space and ideas on furniture and colour schemes, was an important part of the design phase.

A number of services have already booked and confirmed their regular use of the hub including Berkshire Youth, MakeSafe, a new young carers support drop-in, a new LGBT group and a drama group for those with additional needs.

The new hub, located in Bracknell town centre, features:

- a 200m<sup>2</sup> open area
- food preparation unit
- private meeting rooms for one-to-one work
- a larger meeting/activity room
- space for health clinics
- an enclosed outdoor meeting area
- a small office for reception staff on site



# Investing in communities

The council has refocused its approach to leisure, aiming to make it both more viable long term and to offer improved facilities for residents. Before 2018 the council subsidised the operations of three sites, Bracknell Leisure Centre, Coral Reef Waterworld and Downshire Golf course.

During 2018, these sites were outsourced, resulting in an income of £1 million per annum and improved opportunities for customers and staff. During 2019/20 further investment in the leisure centre created new facilities including increasing the amount of gym equipment, adding two fitness studios and a dedicated spin room, and refurbishing the changing rooms, café and reception. The overview and scrutiny commission were also involved to review the performance of the new contract.

During 2020/21, the pandemic had a significant impact on the leisure services, requiring financial support from the council. Physical health has been prioritised as an important area for recovery and the leisure sites are all now open and

encouraging the return of customers. In recovery from the pandemic, there has been a renewed focus on participation and community engagement to support the community with health and wellbeing. Increased local promotion of leisure activities and new introductory offers have aimed at encouraging residents back to physical activity. A long term plan for leisure and sports facilities is in development.



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# 5. Capacity for improvement

The 2016-2019 transformation programme successfully achieved £12 million of savings, exceeding its target as well as improving services for customers. The programme involved significant levels of engagement with staff, residents and councillors. Savings were largely focused on discretionary services including leisure, libraries and parks and countryside.

## 2020-2023 change programme

The next focus for improvement is the 2020-23 change programme. This marks a shift in focus from transformation to business change, recognising that change is delivered in business as usual, not just as large strategic programmes. The new programme has established strong links with services to shape and deliver their own change.

The programme focusses on complex services in the People directorate, and includes the recovery and renewal priorities following the pandemic. The initial phases of the programme were interrupted due to the pandemic but work has now resumed to reflect the different environment for staff and services.

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## Case Study: The Look Out

The Look Out was significantly affected by the pandemic, with most of the business needing to close. This, alongside the continuing financial challenges of local authorities, fuelled the need to maximise the returns on income-generating activities. Therefore, the council had a fundamental re-think of what was offered at The Look Out, including both the science offer and the food offer.

Initial improvements have included considerable enhancement to the café and kitchen area, including a rebranding of the café. A new booking system and online ordering have been introduced and the existing science shows have been expanded to include virtual showings.

These improvements are expected to deliver improved financial returns and a better customer experience. The site will continue to be reviewed and further development is expected.



# Capacity for improvement

In October 2020 the structure and governance of the change programme was reviewed. The programmes below are managed and reported through the business change team (September 2021).

Directors and Assistant Director's lead and are accountable for successful programme delivery

## Cross council programmes

Ways of Working  
Stuart McKellar

Assets  
Kevin Gibbs

Community Hubs  
Andrew Hunter

## People programmes Grainne Siggins

Conversations Model  
Melanie O'Rourke

Bridgewell  
Melanie O'Rourke

Choice Policy / Charging Policy  
Thom Wilson

Heathlands  
Thom Wilson

Fostering and Placements  
Sonia Johnson

High Needs Block  
Cheryl Eyre

Each project is supported by change business partners, project managers and other specialist skills

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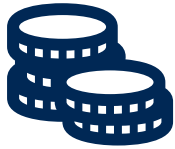
Improvement

Future



# Horizon scanning and environment

Over the next few years there will be further opportunities and risks that arise from the environment and situation of the council. Therefore, some of the key issues the council continues to monitor include:



**Increased and ongoing pressures linked to finances.** This includes the impacts of COVID-19 around the cost and supply of products. This may affect many aspects of the organisations from leisure contracts, education and business change.



**Shortages of skills and labour.** The ongoing pressures on recruitment for specialist skills across the council, including in planning, education and social care. This is likely to continue in the near future and as well as direct service provision, it could affect the council's housing and infrastructure developments.



**Increased demand for social care services.** There is increased pressure for adult social care due to increasing complexity of needs and cost of provision. Children's social care is also needing to provide more support with the increasing number of children on child protection plans due to the pandemic.



**May 2023 elections.** The new political cycle is around 18 months away. Therefore, the political parties will be developing their new manifestos. This could change the direction of priorities for the council in future years.

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# Future challenges and priorities

Reviewing the Council Plan and the journey of the organisation in the context of the current and anticipated environment has identified several areas where additional focus is required.



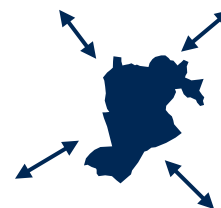
**Regeneration.** This includes the future of the town centre library, the examination of the Local Plan and the completion of The Deck and the Joint Venture sites. These will further strengthen the economic prosperity of the borough.



**Education catch up.** In light of the pandemic, the council is extending its support to schools to ensure young people have the best opportunities.



**Housing and homelessness.** The pandemic has had a significant impact on homelessness demand with further pressure anticipated. Prevention activity is strong but there are challenges in securing sufficient affordable accommodation to meet the presenting needs.



**Partnership working.** To maximise the resilience and opportunities across the wider Berkshire authorities. To deliver the best value for money for residents.



**SEND.** National policy related to funding is likely to add further pressure to the service, therefore a plan for stability is required to continue to support local children.



**Health and care integration.** Increased integration is expected nationally in the coming years, including with ICS reforms. Details are not yet confirmed but this is likely to increase the pressure on the already fragile social care system.

# Annex A

Council Plan assessment in  
context of COVID-19

# COVID-19 assessment

The pandemic has changed the situation of residents and the council. This was evaluated in the community impact assessment in the context of the Council Plan identifying some key impacts.

July 2021 CIA



Value for money

The evidence indicates increasing financial hardship for residents, so the need for council tax support is likely to be greater. The evidence also suggests greater confidence and use of technology, which supports the Council Plan objective to increase digital technology/self-service. Although, some groups are still relatively excluded from digital methods, such as older adults and some of those with learning disabilities. Business stability and economic evidence indicates a risk for the objective to generate income through commercial property investment.



Economic resilience

One fifth of the local population reported in the residents' survey that the council should prioritise supporting the local economy and businesses for the borough's recovery. However the economic environment means several objectives may be affected. This includes the development of The Deck, retaining and attracting businesses in the area and maintaining the viability of shopping and employment areas. Although indicators for these sectors suggest they may also bounce back relatively quickly. There has also been positive impacts for Council Plan delivery such as strengthening the relationships with businesses and delivering infrastructure improvements with minimised disruption to residents.



Education and skills

The evidence indicates it will be now more difficult to create opportunities for care leavers and to increase the number of apprenticeships and training programmes. The impact of limited education and support groups may mean more resources are needed to increase the percentage of children achieving good levels of development in communication and language. The objective for new youth services may also need to be considered in the context of new needs and operating models post-pandemic.



# COVID-19 assessment

The pandemic has changed the situation of residents and the council. This was evaluated in the community impact assessment in the context of the council plan identifying some key impacts.

July 2021 CIA



Caring for you  
and your family

One sixth of the local population reported in the residents' survey that the council should prioritise supporting vulnerable people. The impacts highlight the importance of Council Plan objectives such as using social prescribers in reducing isolation, the need for new mental health services and the value of working closely with the CCG and primary care network. However achieving some objectives, such as promoting a range of sport and leisure activities have been more difficult under the social distancing restrictions and could contribute to more negative health impacts emerging later.



Protecting and  
enhancing your  
environment

The residents' survey feedback would indicate support on council objectives to become carbon neutral, protect green spaces and promote more use of cycle ways. However, the impact assessment findings suggest the objective to encourage greater use of public transport will be more difficult to achieve and in the context of the pandemic, may not be appropriate to promote. The impact of more people using local parks has also added pressure to the maintenance of popular outdoor spaces such as Horseshoe Lake and The Look Out.



Communities

Objectives such as supporting community centres and libraries will be extended through working with partners, to ensure services are integrated and accessible to residents. There has been a positive impact for the Council Plan delivery where the pandemic has encouraged a greater focus on recognising and supporting the diversity in the community. Relationships with partners have strengthened such as with the police and the VCS, supporting the delivery of community objectives.